

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction & Overview

Communities compete with one another on a rapidly increasing number of levels. Where this competition was generally limited to claiming bragging rights over high school sports teams through much of the 20th Century, the past 25 years have seen cities go head-to-head to attract the capital investment of new industries, businesses, visitors, and technology. And since the publication of Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class*, communities are increasingly battling to land possibly the most important of all investments: the human capital of talented young professionals.

As this level of competition among communities continues to grow, destination/community branding has increasingly become a tool in the race to position cities and regions as a preferred locale for life and commerce.

The city of Irving is at the beginning of a dynamic physical transformation that will literally change the face of the city; this literal change allows a unique opportunity for a figurative change as well. In an effort to redefine itself in the many marketplaces in which it competes, the City of Irving, Texas asked its Convention & Visitors Bureau to lead a process to better understand the community's brand essence. From this process, the City sought to identify how Irving is perceived by a variety of potential customers, how community leaders and residents view their community, and to identify and develop the city's brand positioning for the future.

The CVB engaged three nationally-respected research and consulting firms to assist in developing and assessing an outside, unbiased view of the city. By distributing the various research components among these firms, the Bureau decreased the chance of biased findings and increased the breadth of creative analysis necessary to develop a positioning statement for Irving's brand identity.

Zeitgeist Consulting, Destination Analysts, and Development Counsellors International served as lead consultants on this project, which began in the summer of 2007 with one-on-one interviews and focus groups of community leaders to understand how these stakeholders viewed their city.

The next step in the process was to perform research and interviews with several types of Irving's potential customers, both within the city and outside it. Among these groups were corporate CEOs and site selection professionals, who make decisions on location and relocation of company assets; meeting professionals, responsible for choosing conference destinations; business and travel media; and consumers. It was important to understand not only perceptions and awareness of Irving, but those of Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas and Las Colinas.

With interview results and research findings in hand, the consultants and key staff leadership of the Irving CVB reconvened in November 2007 to distill the data and

narrow the key attributes that are already being ascribed to Irving by its customers, and to compare it to perceptions expressed by Irving residents and City employees, data which was collected via surveys in summer 2007.

From the attributes that appeared throughout the various categories, the team identified a set of resonant concepts that describe the core essence and magnetic concepts that are Irving. From these concepts, an Irving brand positioning was created, and potential categories/themes for taglines were developed. All are presented in the following pages.

Far from being an exercise just to develop a new city logo or slogan, Irving's brand already exists in the mind of those that know the City, as well as with those who possess only a peripheral awareness of the community. The *science* of the successful community brand is one that is born from those pre-existing concepts already in the mind of the consumer. The *art* of a successful brand is the combination of those pre-existing concepts that are unique to the community, own-able by the community and appealing to the consumer.

In reviewing the work of many other destinations that have undergone some level of brand development, what becomes most resonant in every instance is the correlation of that brand strategy back to the community at large. As much as any community is likely to view itself through "rose-colored glasses," that rosy hue seldom extends to how we believe others see our communities.

The following pages represent an executive summary of the findings of the research work, the resonant concepts identified, recommended brand positioning, and thematic categories for taglines.

Local Attitudes

Interviews with Irving's Community and Business Leaders

Zeitgeist Consulting led the first phase of the process, interviewing community and business leaders and key stakeholders. Among the most pervasive descriptions offered by the over 100 individuals interviewed were:

- Location, location, location
- Modern
- Sophisticated
- Good place to do business
- Central time zone
- Small town friendly/big city access
- Place of opportunity
- A sense of unlimited potential
- DFW International Airport

As would be found with all survey groups from within the city, community leaders believed that people outside of the city viewed Irving differently. When asked how *they* believed non-residents viewed Irving, community leaders most often noted:

- Home of the Dallas Cowboys
- Confusion with Irvine, California

When asked what image community leaders would like non-residents to have, the most common responses were:

- Unbridled opportunity
- Energy
- International diversity
- Socially active
- A progressive city
- Safe
- A perfect place to live
- Lots to do
- Strong economy
- Creative
- Great place to raise a family
- Premier destination city in North Texas

Corporate Decision-Maker Research

Home to the corporate headquarters of four Fortune 500 companies and several nationally known brands, the City of Irving has a strong business base and surveying this customer category was an important consideration for the branding initiative. Destination Counsellors International surveyed 176 corporate executives who regularly make decisions regarding the location of business operations to better understand their perceptions of the city. These executives were divided into three categories: national contacts not in the DFW area, DFW-area executives not based in Irving, and Irving-based executives.

When asked about their first associations of Irving, national corporate executives noted "Suburb of Dallas" (47%), "Cowboys/Texas Stadium" (38%), and "New/Upscale" (20%) as their top three responses. While just over half of the national sample said they had no opinion about the business climate of Irving, those who did express an opinion gave the city a 3.29 rating on a 5-point scale, with 5 being excellent. Only 30% expressed familiarity with Las Colinas.

Of those executives living in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, the opinions of Irving were, understandably, significantly different. Metroplex executives gave Irving high marks for its "Business-Friendly Government," "Favorable State & Local Tax Policies" and its "High Quality Workforce." Among the same group, Irving received poor marks for its "Public School System" and "Availability of Unskilled Workers." Metroplex executives gave Irving a 3.72 business climate rating on a 5-point scale and said its greatest strength was its "Central Location in the Metroplex" (58%) and "Proximity to the Airport" (56%).

Media Research

In this era of 24-hour news and virtually limitless information content on cable, satellite, and the Internet, the perceptions of reporters and assignment editors can go a long way in influencing attitudes toward a community. Destination Counsellors International performed an online survey with 121 journalists who cover business-related stories for their media outlets.

The most common word or phrase that journalists associated with the DFW area was "hot" (38%), followed by "the Dallas Cowboys" (23%) and "oil" and "sprawl" (both 16%). The most common word or phrase that journalists associated with the city of Irving was "the Dallas Cowboys/Texas Stadium" (39%) and that the city is a "Dallas Suburb" (33%).

When asked their perception of Irving's business climate, a startling 72% said they had no opinion. 5% rated Irving as excellent for business, and 10% as good for business. Only 12% expressed an awareness of Las Colinas.

Meeting Professional Research

As a substantial regional business travel destination, and with work beginning on a convention center project, it was important to understand the perceptions meeting professionals have of Irving. Destination Analysts surveyed 280 professional meeting professionals in August 2007 regarding their views of Irving as a meetings destination.

Roughly three quarters of meeting planners give the DFW Metroplex high marks for location and air accessibility, and 7.5% of the national sample of planners reported having booked an event specifically in Irving.

Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, Houston and Fort Worth were named by planners as the other Texas destinations most often considered when considering a meeting or convention in Irving. Less than 3% of planners rated Irving's qualities/amenities better than the competition.

8.5% of planners expressed an awareness of Las Colinas.

Consumer Research

And then there's the average American consumer. What do they know about or think of Irving, Texas? Destination Analysts surveyed a nationally representative sample of 422 adult Americans living outside the DFW Metroplex for their opinions and perceptions of the area and of Irving.

Despite being the fourth largest metropolitan area in the United States, 72% of respondents said they were not at all familiar with the DFW area. When asked to name cities other than Dallas and Fort Worth in the area, Irving was identified by 8.8% of respondents. When asked, however, if they had ever heard of Irving, 63% replied that they had.

When asked to name their strongest association with Irving, 17% associated the City with the Dallas Cowboys, the second most common response after "none" (60%). Only 7% of respondents recall ever hearing about Las Colinas. But, while they don't know much about Irving, their general perception of the city is positive (65%), with only 14% citing a negative attitude about the city.

Irving Resident Research

The Irving CVB developed an online survey for city residents to share their perceptions and opinions of the city. Over a period of seven weeks, 627 residents completed the survey.

Residents' perceptions of the city focused primarily on its central location, convenience, and access (64%). Others pointed to the city's diversity (18%) and its friendliness (10%). Residents also identified areas for improvement, such as the community being "divided" (17%) and "deteriorating" (14%).

When asked about its points of differentiation with other cities in the area, residents cited the city's prime location and the airport. When asked to name Irving's greatest strength, 83% responded with the concept of central location, convenience, and access.

When asked how they believed people outside of Irving viewed the city, none of the top self-image concepts/strengths were mentioned. Instead, residents believed that non-residents associated Irving with the Dallas Cowboys (29%), as a suburb of Dallas (17%), and with the airport (6%).

City Employee Research

The Irving CVB administered a similar survey of impressions of the city by municipal employees. Over a period of five weeks, 205 employees completed the online survey.

Employees' top perceptions of the city, like residents, focused on Irving's central location and convenience (52%) and its diversity (28%). Employees were more likely than other groups to associate the city with the Dallas Cowboys (17%). Compared to residents, fewer City employees saw Irving as "divided" (10%) and "deteriorating" (11%).

When asked about its points of differentiation with other cities in the area, employees also cited Irving's key location and the airport. When asked to name Irving's greatest strength, 77% responded with the concept of central location, convenience, and access.

Again, when asked how they believed people outside of Irving viewed the city, none of the top self-image concepts were mentioned. Employees also believed that non-residents associated Irving with the Dallas Cowboys (36%) and as a suburb of Dallas (17%).

Overarching Research Findings and Notes

Cities such as Dallas, Seattle, and St. Louis have recently attempted to redefine their brand images and have met with public and consumer resistance to the “new brand.” This may well be because these cities attempted to stray too far from the brand identifiers with which they are already associated in the minds of the American consumer.

That the research completed in the third and fourth quarters of 2007 shows a lack of awareness of Irving in the minds of many across the country could also be Irving’s ace in the hole. With very little brand recognition already catalogued in the minds of America, the city of Irving may paint with a broader brush the images and concepts it would like to establish as its future brand positioning. And, with this general lack of awareness, there will be few that will challenge the positioning as false.

That is, except for those within Irving and, to a lesser extent, the DFW Metroplex. The closer to the center of Irving, the more familiar and opinionated is the consumer. Thus, while the City certainly can position itself the way it likes to the outside world, that positioning still must resonate as true with local residents and community leaders. That is why the results of the interviews with local stakeholders are so important. If nothing else, the brand positioning mined from the research must first pass the local test. Is it believable at home?

If it is, then not only will local residents and community leaders be unlikely to resist or fight the brand, but they may actually serve as ambassadors for the new brand. Unlike many communities with pre-existing brand identities, Irving appears to be in a perfect position from which to redefine its brand, both at home and around the world.

Additional Research Outcomes

It is important to note that the preceding summaries of the seven various research studies are brief, top-level executive summaries. There is significantly more data from each that is germane to the branding process.

Reports setting forth more comprehensive outcomes of each study are included in the supplemental tabs of this document, and a review of this data is encouraged.

Following Up on the Research

What Are Our Strengths?

For the CVB

- Location
- DFW Airport
- Room Inventory
- Waterfront (Potential)
- Business Friendly
- Literal Time Savings (commute to airport, flight time, access to DFW Metroplex)

For the City

- Strong Neighborhoods
- Location
- Las Colinas
- The Corporate/Business Community

For Economic Development

- Location
- Access
- Business Friendly (requires proving we are more biz-friendly than others)
- Competitive Operating Costs, compared to national averages

Concepts That Resonate Across All Perspectives

- Location
- Connection
- Access
- Linkage
- Network
- Intersection
- Seamless
- Urban/Suburban Mix
- Edge City
- City Center
- Boom Town
- Heart & Soul
- Easy Button
- Quality of Life
- More Business-Oriented Position than Arlington's "Fun Central"

Irving's Brand Position

For many who know Irving, it has been about being the home of the Dallas Cowboys for decades. As the Cowboys prepare to move to another community, Irving has the opportunity to reposition itself in the minds of consumers around the country.

But Irving has never been just about the Cowboys. The research findings generated from a diverse audience of national and local publics reveals that Irving is known for a number of different things.

At its core, however, Irving is about location. And Irving is about business.

Its proximity to DFW International Airport, its geographically central position within the United States, its location within the Central Time Zone, and its government's commitment to being a business-friendly partner combine to make Irving a compelling entrepreneurial hub.

What it *will* be is just as important: A destination known for easy access, solid business results, and cultural entertainment geared for grown-ups. A destination rich in diversity and with fascinating people from around the world. A city that feels comfortable while providing access to an array of metropolitan experiences and activities.

Part of Irving's magnetism will be its proximity to water, with several of its top hotels, meeting spaces, and entertainment venues located on its canal system and Urban Center lakefront. It will also derive strength from Las Colinas and the city's solidly-growing business community, providing a backdrop of success, accomplishment and possibility.